



A Better CT Institute

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To: Connecticut General Assembly Human Services Committee:

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Senator Herron Gaston, Vice Chair

Senator Matthew L. Lesser, Co-Chair
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From:

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Re: Testimony in favor of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status

A Better Connecticut Institute (ABCI) submits this testimony in support of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status. ABCI is a new non-profit that investigates, researches, and reports the sources of racialized income and wealth inequality in Connecticut. ABCI's mission is to create space, in person and electronically, to share knowledge with residents and policy makers about proactive progressive policies that will help build greater equity for all Connecticut residents. This testimony is also submitted in collaboration with Recovery for All, of which ABCI is a member. Recovery for All is a statewide coalition bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations across Connecticut with the common mission to eliminate systemic inequalities and rebuild a better Connecticut.

Much of last week's conversation on the floors of House and Senate regarding the bond, revenue and volatility caps focused on the idea that furthering those fiscal restraints was a "good investment" for Connecticut's future and future generations will be thankful for it. Legislators



discussed how the commitment to these spending restrictions was a good fiscal and moral decision for our state. It is ABCI's hope that the General Assembly looks beyond just "republican ideas" (as they were called) when considering how to invest in Connecticut through this bi-annual budget.

Connecticut jockey's each year to be known as the country's wealthiest state but our health statistics show our well-being is in jeopardy. Connecticut is:

- ranked 44th in alcohol use among youth;
- ranked 33rd in drug deaths among women;
- ranked 37th in food insecurity for women; and
- ranked 42nd in the treatment of ADD/ADHD among children.ⁱ

More needs to be done to build access to health care and improve our state's health outcomes. To do so, Connecticut must directly invest in its residents that are most in need by making smart fiscal choices to bridge the wealth and income hurdles that those with greater financial power do not face.

Connecticut by its own admission knows how unaffordable health care is for its residents:

Health care costs are unaffordable for more than one in five households in Connecticut. Measured against the Connecticut Healthcare Spending Target, 21% of households have health care costs that are unaffordable. People who buy insurance on their own are much more likely to have unaffordable health care. Two-thirds of households that get their health insurance through the state's individual market – 67% – have unaffordable health care, compared to 16% of those with employer-sponsored insurance.ⁱⁱ

If the state knows its health exchange market is already unaffordable for those who qualify, it must publicly admit that our unauthorized immigrant population is fighting an almost impossible battle to afford health care for their families. Families are put in a position to choose taking on more debt and receiving health care or no health care and risk getting works. Consider for a minute, a parent/guardian who hesitates to bring a high school aged child to see a doctor when the child is sick only to learn later it could have been treated, saving their child from the illness. Consider a teenager who is constantly trying to figure out how to bring in extra money home to pay for family health expenses whether, not able to focus on school or being a child. This is happening daily in our state.

The Governor's budget plan to seek the assistance of a non-profit to assist families with crippling medical debt is simply a band-aid on a hemorrhage of an economic crisis in our state. It is a one-time investment that does not go far enough. It helps in the immediate for some families but does nothing to aid families going forward. Immigrants make up fifteen percent of the state's population and eighteen percent of its workforce.ⁱⁱⁱ They invest in our state by paying taxes,



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rents, mortgages, grocery bills, utilities, and much more. It is reported that over 50,000 of our state's children live with a family member unauthorized to reside in the United States.^{iv} Expanding access to HUSKY regardless of immigration status is an important step in ensuring Connecticut's full immigrant community has access to the healthcare which fortifies our workforce, helps employers and industry, and supports families by ensuring caretakers stay healthy.

Without expanding this coverage, we continue to leave individuals to seek health interventions when they are most sick and in need of emergent health care. We leave our hospitals to deal with the crisis. The General Assembly is aware Connecticut is short on nurses and those working in our emergency rooms are subject to mandatory overtime. If residents could access community-based health care early on, we could begin to alleviate some of the burden on our ailing health care system. Fiscally, estimates show that this expansion would reduce uncompensated health care costs by \$63.3 million dollars. Expanding access to health insurance is a long-term moral and fiscal investment plan in families and a statement of true equity. ABCI supports passing HB 6616 as it is a sound decision toward building a better Connecticut.

ⁱ <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/state/CT>

ⁱⁱ <https://portal.ct.gov/healthscorect/-/media/OHS/CT-Healthcare-Affordability-Index/The-Connecticut-Healthcare-Affordability-Index-What-it-is-and-how-it-works.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-connecticut>

^{iv} https://interactives.americanprogress.org/projects/2017/Immigration_Interactive/?_ga=2.10800818.724157303.1676311108-2039501864.1674603298